

Carol C. Mattusch, *The Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum. Life and Afterlife of a Sculpture Collection*. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005. Pp. xxiii, 392; ill. 500, map. ISBN 0-89236-722-9. \$85.00.

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The Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum owes its fame to (1) the library with carbonised book scrolls, containing mainly Greek texts, (2) the enormous amount of sculptures that adorned the rooms and gardens, and (3) its being hidden under a 20 metres thick layer of concrete-like lava. The latter fact means that the excavations were (and are) highly complicated and that people thought (and think) that there might still be more treasures to be explored. Between 1991 and 1998, therefore, some digging was carried out by the Superintendency of Pompeii and the University of Naples on the initiative of the late papyrologist Marcello Gigante, who hoped to find a second (Latin) library. And nowadays? To say it clearly, as the Italians do: "tutto tace". There have been no sound publications beyond some articles in the *Cronache Ercolanesi* and other rather local periodicals, and none of the finds is on show. It is clear that the reigning Superintendency resists very strongly further expeditions and, I think, rightly.¹ The recent work done in the Vesuvian area demonstrates the need for a good master plan, especially concerning post-excavation procedures. The remains unearthed of the Villa of the Papyri are sad ruins without any substantial new information to give. It is also illustrative that the newest monograph, the book here reviewed, has almost nothing about the latest discoveries. Even the new sculptures found there have barely been taken into account. Probably no permission was given, because the excavator(s) still 'work' on it -- Carol Mattusch is too polite to even hint at that matter.

Having said this, I turn to Mattusch' masterly book which, as one will understand, has everything to do with the fantastic endeavour of the 18th-century excavators under the guidance of the Swiss engineer Karl Weber with his forced workmen and convicts. The plan he drew at that time is crucial for all studies in the field, as it contains meticulously recorded findspots of all objects found and hoisted out of the subterranean galleries to embellish the palace of the King of Naples at nearby Portici.

This does not at all mean that Mattusch did no new research. The book is full of new information and new insights, especially concerning the bronze sculpture. As a leading scholar in the field of ancient bronze statues and casting techniques, Mattusch was the ideal person to undertake the huge task of analysing the set of sculpture that is now in the National Museum at Naples, where she got permission to do all a specialist wants to do with this sort of material: tests of alloys and possible remains of the pre-casting process in the interior, as well as the study of repairs and restorations, both antique and modern.

Mattusch starts with a succinct description of the discovery of the villa and the speculations about its owner. She concludes that the oldest candidate proposed, L. Calpurnius Piso, consul in 58 BC, is still the most plausible one: he was a follower of the Epicurean School and

appreciated statuary, as is known from his connections with the Saepta at Rome and its sculptures (pp. 20-23).

A lengthy chapter (pp. 33-124) describes the discovery of the classical past and the Grand Tour travellers to Naples as well as the development of the tourist industry in the 18th and 19th centuries and focuses on the visits to Herculaneum, Pompeii, Portici (Museum Herculanense until the early 19th century) and Vesuvius. Some words are devoted to the finds from the Villa, which appear to have been found in a relatively good state of preservation. The earliest publications highlighted in this chapter are quoted properly. Winckelmann's critical accounts and History of Art will reappear frequently in the following sections: it is clear that he had observed very well what was important and what not. The chapter is rather unbalanced in length in comparison to the other sections, and the excursus has become a goal of its own. In a book about the Villa of the Papyri, it forms a secondary topic that many readers will not look for and this hiding place is not favourable.

The sculptures slumbered for a long time until the then director, Alfonso de Franciscis created a specific section for all finds from the villa in the early 1970s. This led to new scholarly studies about the meaning of the sculptures like that on the portraits by Dimitri Pandermalis, written under the guidance of Paul Zanker, and the work about the taste of living in villas by Richard Neudecker. Maria Wojcik gathered many dates and Gigante edited a collection of smaller essays, including that of Pandermalis.² Most studies saw the collection of statuary as a set, complete in itself and therefore subject to iconographical analysis. Mattusch makes clear that it grew gradually by acquiring new pieces, adding copies of existing statues to form pendants and by obtaining objects as gifts. She can demonstrate this by the use of data gained from an analysis of the alloys of the bronze statuary. It is the innovative aspect of metallurgy that gives impetus to further research. I think that she might have done research on the subsequent 'strata' of the statues, but I realize that this is not an easy task. A relative chronology is difficult, let alone an absolute one, as the statues as such do not yield information to establish a date of production.

The third chapter (pp. 125-142) zooms in on the techniques adopted in the research. Henry Lie from Harvard carried out x-ray and core-sampling analyses in 1997 and 2000 in the museum at Naples. The excellent photos throughout the book are the products of these study campaigns. The x-ray brought to light matters like the degree of internal reinforcement as well as the addition of bronze to the old pieces. All bronze statues date to prior to AD 79 and were made in the lost-wax method (there is a lengthy, clear explanation of this technique for the layman, not necessary for the specialist). The technical research allowed Mattusch to subdivide groups of similar statues into 'originals' and 'copies'.

The catalogue descriptions of the statues are accurate and made in one format, which makes the consultation of single items easier and enhances the possibility of comparing pieces. Groups of similar pieces have been clustered (e.g. portrait herms, garden dwarfs etc.). Little new material is presented, every bit having been catalogued by Comparetti and De Petra in 1883 in an enormous book that remained the standard publication.³

Chapter 4 presents descriptions of the 22 marble statues found all-over the villa. Many pieces show scratches and pencil marks which are the results of the application of plaster to make moulds for replicas (e.g. fig. 4.5, 4.14). It is not necessary to discuss all objects here. I single out Mattusch' excellent stylistic and formal analysis of the Athena: she shows how this was made up of various styles and does not necessarily reflect a specific classical masterpiece. The

small nude boy is an odd item in the series. Does he represent a child of the owner? The hair is of Julio-Claudian fashion, but if so, his nudity might be seen as an indication of his being dead. Mattusch has collected some nice quotations (p. 156) concerning the Pan copulating with a she-goat, but her own text does not give an analysis, whereas this sort of statue has been discussed widely in the last decades.[4](#)

As for the herms she interprets that of an old 'bearded intellectual' (p. 158) as possibly Anakreon, which is not a bad suggestion. The man with "shaggy hair" (p. 169-170) might be a Cynic philosopher. His hair is nothing other than a mix of dreadlocks, which symbolises the lack of cure for the body in this branch of thinkers.[5](#)

The chapter finishes with stimulating remarks based on technical observations (pp. 182-187). It is pointed out that the herm heads without shafts stood on columns made in brick (p. 185) -- a rather cheap solution; the museum display is much more decorous. As to the marbles used, some pieces of high quality (Athena, Pan and goat, veiled woman, nude boy) are in Luni marble, the others in Attic marble. All herm heads are Pentelic and have the same dimensions and style and, hence, stem from one studio. They might have been bought in one bunch and reflect the admiration for ideal persons from the past. I add the suggestion that the Greek marble expresses the notion of old Greek urban (Athenian) culture, whereas the Luni marble was used for specific themes, mostly Roman.

Chapter 5 describes the 63 bronze statues and opens the eyes of the reader and student of these pieces in many ways. When the figures have blind bronze eyes, these are modern restorations: the original ones were in bone and glass. What seemed to be pendants made together turn out to be subsequent copies, as is the case with the two famous boy athletes (most probably runners, p. 194) and the 'Danzatrici' (stock models of archaizing maidens and nothing more, pp. 214-215). On the other hand, the twelve putti and the four Silenoi are composed of identical parts and show the sloppy talent of a local workshop, not differing much from our mass production of modern garden gnomes. Alloy, precise measuring, and differences of details -- these sorts of factors have never been taken into account before.

Most pieces underwent thorough restorations in the 18th century, and some were restored for a second time after WWII. The complicated pedigree of the Seated Hermes is illustrative: it was brought to Berlin where it was damaged and had to be treated again after its return to Naples (pp. 88-89, 216-222, fig. 2.43). As Mattusch rightly observes, many bronze herms have been mounted in a wrong way on their modern shaft, i.e. too much inclined forward. The original position was strictly horizontal, so that the persons were looking forward and not downwards.

Mattusch refrains from making attributions and interpretations, of which too many are known for several pieces. The 'ideal' heads of the Doryphoros and Amazone Sciarra types are of high quality, have the same alloy and must have been made as a pair. The signature of Apollonius might suggest that a Greek worked in an Italic studio, e.g. that of Baiae where plaster fragments of the opera nobilia had been found. In this context it is sad and strange that the copy of the Sciarra Amazon of the new excavations could not be taken fully into account (fig. 5.196: head in excavation crate).

The heads of the flamen and beardless Roman man are dated to the time of Tiberius (p. 275), which is -- if she is right, what I do not doubt -- the only hard dating of all sculpture pieces.

The evaluation (p. 332) of marble and bronze pieces distinguishes four groups: (1) small portraits of writers, (2) herms of famous men, (3) large copies or copy-like statuary stemming from Baiae or a similar workshop, (4) fountain decoration. Gods are extremely rare, whereas putti and Silens are popular garden decorations. So are the portrait busts and heads. The collection must have been formed gradually in the 1st century BC-1st century AD by means of purchase, gifts and exchange.

There is a last, perhaps obligatory chapter about the 'Afterlives', especially in the plan of the Villa of the Papyri and Malibu, where J. Paul Getty constructed his first museum in the form of the Herculanean example. Modern casts of the old statues were acquired from the Chiurazzi foundry at Naples, still extant with a different ownership and using the antique moulds taken from the statues themselves.

In sum, Mattusch has done an excellent job by studying 'old' material with a fresh and keen eye and with the help of technical expertise. In this way she has reached important conclusions and has contributed notably to our understanding of the production of sculptural adornments in Roman villas.

Notes:

1. Mattusch mentions criticisms (p. 53-54; bibliography on the digs p. 118 notes 58 and 61). My only contribution to the study of the villa -- not mentioned by Mattusch -- concluded in the same vein, i.e. that new explorations would not have an immediate scientific impact and that the results would not compensate the enormous expenses: E.M. Moormann, *Le pitture della Villa dei papiri ad Ercolano*, in M. Gigante (ed.), *Atti del XVII Congresso internazionale di papirologia*, Napoli 1984, 637-674. This contribution had been written on request of the organisers, who wanted to have some archaeological papers regarding the villa. It contains more about the mural decorations than the few remarks in Mattusch p. 15, 16, figs. 1.17, 1.18, 1.20.

2. See p. XV for an overview of the bibliography.

3. D. Comparetti & G. De Petra, *La villa ercolanese dei Pisoni, I suoi monumenti e la sua biblioteca*, Turin 1883 (= Naples 1962, with an update by A. de Franciscis).

4. A. Staehli, *Die Verweigerung der Luste. Erotische Gruppen in der antiken Plastik*, Berlin 1999.

5. Cp. P. Zanker, *Die Maske des Sokrates und das Bild des Intellektuellen in der antiken Kunst*, Munich 1995, 29-38, figs. 12, 16 (Anakreon), 127-131, figs. 72a-b, 73 (Cynics).